

Patient Information brochure

Allergic Conjunctivitis

Q: What are the causes of red eye?

A: The commonest causes of red eye are

1. Infective conjunctivitis
2. Allergic conjunctivitis
3. Uveitis
4. Acute angle closure glaucoma
5. Dry Eyes
6. Many many more.....

Q: What is allergic conjunctivitis?

A: Eye allergies are also called “allergic conjunctivitis.” It is a reaction to indoor and outdoor allergens (such as pollen, mold, dust mites or pet dander) that get into your eyes and cause inflammation of the conjunctiva, the tissue that lines the inside of the eyelid and helps keep your eyelid and eyeball moist. Eye allergies are not contagious.

Q: How common is allergic conjunctivitis?

A: 60 % of the general population have some form of allergy. The numbers are higher in metros and cities. 20 % of the general population have eye allergy. Approximately 4 percent of allergy sufferers have eye allergies as their primary allergy, often caused by many of the same triggers as indoor/outdoor allergies. For some, eye allergies can prove so uncomfortable and irritating that they interfere with job performance, impede leisure-time and sports activities, and curtail vacations.

Q: What causes eye allergies?

A: Allergens are what trigger your eye allergies. To the body, allergens are considered foreign substances that threaten or irritate the body, such as pollen from ragweed or cat dander. If you react to certain allergens, this means your eyes have become sensitized at some point. Therefore, when your eyes come into contact with specific allergens, an allergic response results.

Eye allergies are grouped in various ways, one of which is where the allergens are located—indoors or outdoors. Some allergens are more likely to be found indoors. Others you’re more likely to be exposed to outdoors.

INDOOR ALLERGENS Examples of common indoor allergens that may cause itchy eyes are airborne cat dander and dust mites.

OUTDOOR ALLERGENS Examples of common outdoor allergens that often trigger itchy eyes are grass, tree, and ragweed pollens.

Other substances called “irritants” (such as dirt and smoke, chlorine, etc.) and even viruses and bacteria, can compound the effect of eye allergies, or even cause irritation symptoms similar to eye allergies for people who aren’t even allergic. The eyes are an easy target for allergens and irritants because, like the skin, they are exposed and sensitive. Certain medications and cosmetics can also cause eye allergy symptoms. By way of response to these allergens and irritants, the body releases chemicals called histamines, which in turn produce inflammation.

Q: What are the signs of eye allergy?

A: The common symptoms of eye allergies are the result of this inflammation:

1. Redness
2. Itching
3. Burning
4. Tearing or watering
5. Swollen eyes
6. Gritty sensation in the eyes
7. Intolerance to contact lenses

These symptoms may be accompanied by a runny or itchy nose, sneezing, coughing, or a sinus headache. Many also find that their vision is temporarily blurred, or that they feel distracted, unproductive, or tired.

Q: I have these symptoms all through the year? Can it still be allergic conjunctivitis?

A: There are two types of allergies.

- **Seasonal allergic conjunctivitis:** In this type eyes are affected only in a particular season. Summer, winter or wet season depending on the cause of allergy (allergen)
- **Perennial allergic conjunctivitis:** In this type eyes are affected throughout the year. This kind is similar to other severe forms of allergy like Bronchial Asthma. It is common in children. Also people having this form of allergy have some other severe allergic conditions like skin allergy (atopic dermatitis) or allergic bronchitis or Asthma.

So, allergy can recur throughout the year. However the eyes have to be examined to rule out other causes of red eye especially uveitis.

Q: Can children have allergic conjunctivitis?

A: Yes. Infact allergic conjunctivitis is very common in children, similar to tonsillitis or adenoids. It commonly persists till about 15 years of age and then in majority of patients it subsides thankfully.

Since the course is chronic, children have to be treated carefully, making sure the side- effects of medication don’t damage the eyes. So self medication is not advisable, not just in children but even in adults.

Q: How are eye allergies treated?

A: The best defense against allergic conjunctivitis is to first avoid contact with substances that trigger your allergies. When prevention is not enough, consider over-the-counter or prescription treatments. Eye allergy symptoms may disappear completely, either when the allergen is removed or after the allergy is treated.

- **Oral medication**

Oral anti-histamines are crucial apart from eye medications. Till overall allergy is treated, ocular allergy is not going to subside completely.

- **Eye medication**

- Ocular medications like anti-histamines and NSAIDs help in controlling the ocular allergy to certain extent.
- Lubricants help in washing away the allergens and the toxic inflammatory material.
- In some severe cases, mild steroid eye drops are needed to treat the allergy.

Q: Can allergic conjunctivitis cause vision loss?

A: In majority of cases it does not cause vision loss. However in severe cases, it can cause corneal ulcers, which if untreated can cause vision loss.

Q: How to prevent allergy?

A: Eye allergy can be prevented by:

- Don't touch or rub your eye(s).
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Wash your bed linens and pillowcases in hot water and detergent to reduce allergens.
- Avoid wearing eye makeup.
- Don't share eye makeup.
- Never use another person's contact lenses or misuse contact lenses

Q: Can contact lens cause allergy?

A: For contact lens wearers, eye allergies can cause unique problems. During allergy season, there are many loyal contact lens wearers who revert back to their eyeglasses due to discomfort. But many others develop strategies that allow for daily lens wear in comfort and ease. And as for those with allergies who think they cannot wear contact lenses – the fact is many of them can.

In the past, contact lens wearers have been interrupted by allergies, especially seasonal allergies, causing some to discontinue lens-usage, and others to stop considering contact lenses as an option. But some of today's contact lenses are far more accommodating for people with allergy-related eye conditions. In addition, they are available in multiple modalities, including daily disposable and two-week replacement. Your doctor will direct you to the right lens for your vision and lifestyle needs. Replacement wear lenses require maintenance—cleaning and disinfecting every day after removal—as proteins, allergens, and lipids cling to their surface. These can cause discomfort, particularly for allergy-sufferers.

Smart Strategies for Contact Lens Wearers

Here are some strategies that doctors recommend:

- Limit wearing time.
- Make your own allergy-season “paradigm shift,” by wearing your lenses part-time, for example, for sports, social events (e.g., weddings and proms), and photos with family and friends.
 - Use daily wear, two- or four-week replacement contacts.
 - Use eye drops as prescribed by your doctor.

Studies have shown that single-use contact lenses can be a healthy option for contact wearers in general, including for some people with eye allergies.